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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S AND INR/AF

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS DISPUTE: LCD "WANTS TO TALK," BUT ABOUT WHAT?

REF: MASERU 251 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: Elizabeth C. Power, Deputy Chief of Mission.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a July 30 meeting with CDA, Foreign Minister Kenneth Tsekoa elaborated on points made at a July 29 press conference by the governing Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), stating that the government wants to talk to the opposition parties to find a resolution to the current impasse over the disputed allocation of proportional representation seats in parliament. As there is no indication that the LCD will consider supporting the reallocation of seats, it is not clear that the opposition will agree to sit down with the GOL. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On July 29, LCD party publicist Khotso Matla held a press conference at which he urged Basotho not to participate in the August 3 stay away called by opposition parties. In addition, he stated that Basotho should sit down together and resolve their own problems, without the interference of outsiders, in a reference to SADC mediator Ketumile Masire, whose report was "baffling" and not helpful."

¶3. (C) On July 30, CDA met with Tsekoa to discuss the stay away and related political issues; CDA had earlier scheduled a meeting with LCD Secretary General and Minister of Communications Mothetjoa Metsing for July 24, but Metsing did not show up. Tsekoa lamented the current situation, noting that both sides are firmly entrenched in their positions with no signs of accepting compromise. When asked about the way forward out of the impasse, he stated that he was recommending to the Prime Minister that a meeting be called with the opposition leaders, to bring everyone around the same table and see whether some compromise could be reached. Tsekoa also noted that when he travels to Swaziland this weekend for the meeting of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defense, and Security, he would also canvass his fellow foreign ministers to see whether they would support further SADC intervention; he specifically mentioned that including former South African President Thabo Mbeki as a negotiator would be helpful. He noted that the Independent Electoral Commission already has a draft law written that closes several loopholes and will provide a stronger electoral system in the future.

¶4. (C) Regarding the stay away itself, Tsekoa said that the government was ready for it, with all civil servants called in off leave to ensure that they were at their desks on Monday morning. He stated that any citizen has the right to stay home from work and that the GOL would only intervene if the opposition attempted to "enforce" the stay away using intimidation, road blocks, or violence of any kind. Tsekoa was not confident that there would be much public participation in the stay away, but acknowledged that the opposition had used intimidation tactics in the past to inflate the numbers of those who did not report to work. Tsekoa described several violent incidents from the 1998 riots, during which he held the position of Government Secretary, and noted that no one wanted to see a return to those days.

15. (U) Meanwhile, the Maseru Chamber of Commerce and the Maseru Region Transport Operators (MRTO) organization have stated that are holding mediation efforts on July 30 in a "last ditch effort" to bring both sides together and resolve the conflict peacefully. They are concerned about the effects on their businesses of either a prolonged stay away or any resulting political violence. The MRTO has already stated that they will not support the stay away as an organization, although the GOL has stated that it is ready to provide transport as needed, just in case.

16. (C) COMMENT: Tsekoa's comments about talks with the opposition are not reassuring, as he made it very clear that reallocation of seats will not be on the table. Given the opposition's firm statement that reallocation of seats is the only acceptable solution, it does not seem likely that they will even come to the table. Tsekoa's proposal to continue the SADC mediation is likely to be simply a means of prolonging the process; as more time passes with the GOL holding the disputed 20 seats, the prospect of having to give them up becomes less and less likely. His acknowledgement of how much Lesotho has to lose if violence breaks out was important, but he gave no indication that the LCD was willing to bend at all to prevent the violence.

POWER